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ABSTRACT

Since 1961, the Department of Speech of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has required all students to take a "Principles of Effective Speaking" course. Some faculty members tried repeatedly between 1967 and 1987 to increase the course from two to three credit hours and to heighten the course's emphasis on listening skills. A 1990 report of the university's General Education Committee identified listening skills as one of the foundations that a basic speech course should offer and submitted a course proposal to the Department of Speech Communication/ Theatre Arts. Among the department's final recommendations was increasing the course's emphasis on listening skills. Because of concerns that the call for improved listening instruction was not accompanied by specifics in the course outline concerning how to address listening skills, a proposal for a 1.5 week-long mini-unit dealing with listening was developed. Packets of listening-related materials were provided to instructors to assist in their teaching. In the first year of the redesigned course, the feeling within the department is that considerable strides have been made toward fulfilling course objectives. (One appendix presenting the course syllabus is attached.) (SG)

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"A MOSAIC: Designing the Listening Component of a Required Basic University Course"

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A Presentation for the 13th Annual Convention
of the International Listening Association

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LISTENING IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

"A MOSAIC: Designing the Listening Component of a Required Basic University Course"

Tom E. Wirkus

Since 1961, the Department of Speech at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, has offered a two-credit course, "Principles of Effective Speaking," required of all students enrolled in degree programs. On three occasions, from 1967-1987, we tried, without success, to gain approval for a three-credit course. We thought our request was not without basis, for our students--since 1981 at least--were attending three clock hours a week under a one large assembly, two small assemblies plan. This course devoted one hour to the topic of listening in the large assembly, though some small assembly instructors did follow up with additional handouts and/or activities.

About three years ago, discussions began on our campus concerning the prospect of a Basic Studies program review with the thought of moving to a new General Education program. My colleagues and I felt that this now could be our opportunity to make a case for a three-credit course. And so begins the **mosaic**: our attempt to bring together the bits and pieces to form a clear picture for the many levels of approval.

The following distinctions need to be made between the Basic Studies and proposed and eventual General Education programs. Quoting from the final General Education Committee Report, as adopted as amended by the Faculty Senate (Nov. 29, 1990):

> The current Basic Studies program at UW-La Crosse consists of distribution requirements of courses from different disciplines. According to the University catalog the purposes of the Basic Studies program are to "(1) bring students into contact with major areas of human experience prior to more specialized studies of their own choosing and (2) reduce the pressure on first-year students to choose such specialized studies before they have the benefit of information and counseling during their first two semesters" (p.56).
>
> In contrast, the General Education Program Document asserts that the primary purpose of general education is to "cultivate knowledge, skills and dispositions essential for independent learning and thinking". By endorsing this concept, the Faculty Senate recognizes that general education plays a vital role in all students' undergraduate experience. General education not only occupies a significant portion of all students' undergraduate program but it is uniquely concerned with the broad education of the whole person.
>
> The general education curriculum contributes more than any other single program or academic unit to the definition of an institution. The underlying rationale and goals of the curriculum as well as the constellation of courses reflect the faculty's values about what is important to know and to know how to do as a result of a college education. Essentially, the general education curriculum represents a substantive part of what the faculty thinks it means to be well-educated.

Faculty have an important, corporate responsibility to grapple with the question of what it means to be well-educated. We believe that this discussion should be on-going rather than periodic. This does not mean that the University needs to re-invent a new curriculum each year. But, there should be a forum in which the whole general education curriculum can be discussed, debated and evaluated systematically in order to maintain that which is good and to identify that which could be better. This should entail on-going review of existing courses in the curriculum.

There should also be a means by which the curriculum can be revised to better achieve its goals. And, in a deeper sense, there should be opportunities to question the basic assumptions, goals and purposes on which the curriculum is based.

Only by continuing to think about the curriculum can a faculty hope to create the best education for its students. The general education curriculum must be viewed not as a permanently fixed set of courses but as a means of educating all students in the best ways possible.

The next piece of business was to design the overall program structure. Two major categories formed the basis of the program:

SKILLS COMPONENT

Literacy: Tools for Skilled Communication
- Writing
- Oral Communication

Tools for Structured Analysis
- Mathematics
- Foreign Language
- Computer Science
- Logic

LIBERAL STUDIES COMPONENT

Minority Studies and Multiracial Women's Studies
International and Multi-Cultural Studies: Becoming World Citizens
Science: Understanding the Natural World
Self and Society: Understanding Oneself and the Social World
Humanistic Studies: The Search for Values and Meaning
Arts: The Aesthetic Experience
Health and Physical Well Being: Learning to Create Healthy Lives

There are other minor elements that contribute to the program, one of which is a requirement that students enroll in two Writing Emphasis courses during their university career.

Now knowing the basic structure, our department prepared and distributed questionnaires to a cross-section of alumni, reviewed studies from our professional journals, surveyed sister institutions in Wisconsin, and drew the following conclusions:

I. UW-La Crosse students deserve a course in speech whose quality is equal to that of other campus offerings.

II. Speech is our most basic communication medium.

A. It is closest to actual thought.
B. It is pervasive.

III. The basic speech course should offer skills students can use immediately:

A. Organizing and sequencing main points.
B. Supporting ideas.
C. Wording and phrasing ideas.
D. Listening actively.
E. Thinking critically.
F. Analyzing ideas.
G. Delivering ideas.
H. Analyzing audiences.
I. Discovering and using information and evidence sources.

IV. The present two-credit, large assembly/small assembly format is a less-than-satisfactory approach to achieving these speech skills.

V. The proposed three-credit, small assembly format offers significant educational advantages over the present format.

VI. For the first and, perhaps, only time in its history, the University is in a position to accomplish this major educational reform without incurring additional costs.

VII. Oral communication is a basic skill, touching all our lives. There is an established need for better instruction in public speaking. If UW-La Crosse is sincerely looking to increase educational quality, the proposal to upgrade STH 101, "Principles of Effective Speaking," from two credits to three credits must be seriously considered and acted upon favorably.

The University General Education Committee established a proposal form for submission of courses for consideration. In addition to the usual course title, description, unit outline, rationale, and so on, proposers had to address the following seven questions:

1. What are the objectives of this course?

2. How does this course address the purposes and goals of general education as specified in the GEPD (pp. 103) and "General Education and the Inquiry-Based Approach"?

3. How does this course implement inquiry-based instruction? Consider reading and writing assignments, lecture, discussion, laboratory, student interaction, and any other instructional practices relevant to the course.

4. Describe the ways in which students will be "active participants in learning and thinking" in this course.

5. In what ways will students' knowledge and thinking skills be evaluated?

6. How many students can be accommodated each semester in this course? Indicate the number of sections, class size and availability of faculty resources.

7. If the course falls in the skills category, describe the proficiency/assessment opportunity that will be available to students and describe how it is connected to the proficiency/achievement expected of students in the course.

The Department of Speech Communication/Theatre Arts now had to make final decisions concerning emphasis areas for the course and for responding to the General Education Committee's questions. Particular attention had to be given to critical thinking skills and research skills--in addition to the standard presentational and listening skills areas that one would expect to have emphasized in a course of this nature. Many in the department had thought that we had been involved for years in inquiry-based instruction, but now this also had to be specified. Though we also had provided minimal help with library and research instruction, we agreed that greater emphasis would have to be made in this area. [A copy of the general course syllabus, provided to all students, is attached--Appendix A]

The plan for the course and the resulting syllabus were developed with the thought to various audiences (more pieces in our **mosaic**):

A course that would:

1. Accommodate the objectives of the General Education program and inquiry-based instruction;

2. Provide for the kind of coverage that we thought our students needed and deserved (including, finally, some substantive attention to Listening);

3. Satisfy the unique needs of the four university colleges (Arts, Letters, Sciences; Business Administration; Health, Physical Education, Recreation; Education) and specific programs within those colleges (exs. pre-professional, ALS, Department of Public Instruction mandates, College of Education.);

4. Be supported in philosophy and coverage by various Speech Communication/Theatre Arts constituencies: the New Course Committee for SPC 110; the Speech Communication Committee (consisting of all who teach lower or upper-division Speech Communication courses); and the entire department; and

5. In its final form be approved by the General Education Committee, the Dean of our college (ALS), the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and, finally, the Faculty Senate.

When the General Education Committee first reviewed our proposal, members questioned whether enough emphasis was being devoted to listening instruction. That concern was addressed with the following response:

> The Committee was concerned with the fact that although "one objective of the proposal was to develop 'active listening,' there was nothing specific in the course outline to support this."
>
> The STH 101 Committee felt this to be a valid concern when it was raised in October. As a result, the Committee, in consultation with Dr. Tom Wirkus, has developed and is about to bring the following proposal to the department for its consideration. The proposal is for a module, or mini-unit, focusing directly on listening.

DAY #1: Information related to perspectives on Listening (i.e., need, amount of day/week spent in four communication skills, concerns in business and the professions for competent listeners, etc.); definition of listening; purposes/objectives in listening; common faults/barriers. Assigning of a listening log (journal) with the suggestion that the log contain from 4-7 entries. [An appropriate handout could provide specific guidelines/ suggestions for this assignment.]

DAY #2: Discussion of ways to gain skill in listening (these could be related to the purposes/objectives introduced the previous period); audio or video recording of a situation which requires students to listen and respond [if this listening module were scheduled early in the course--a preference of most communication instructors--the exercise would probably relate to informative material]. Some information could be included this day to reaffirm the importance of nonverbal communication in the listening process. Time permitting, information on notetaking options (as an alternative to outlining) would be appropriate.

DAY #3: Discussion of entries from the 3 to 7-day listening log. Following a sharing of common listening problems, the methods to overcome difficulties could be reaffirmed. This could be followed by a discussion of establishing goals: what each of us will do during the remainder of the course and beyond to reinforce positive listening behaviors.

In addition to this 1 1/2 week module, instructors would no doubt continue with practices that have been established for years in STH 101. These include question-answer sessions (forums) following each speaker in each round beyond the initial project (the so-called "ice-breaker" project), formal in-class or out-of-class speaker evaluation assignments, and/or utilization of videotaped small group or public speaking assignments which may be viewed and critiqued in the Speech Lab (341 Fine Arts).

The repackaging of the course content--were the course to become three credit hours--would provide us time for the listening sequence. We could find one hour from the current one hour large assembly lecture with the additional two hours resulting from time saved through a more direct relationship of theory to practice, which the current large assembly-small assembly format does not permit.

This response seemed to satisfy the General Education Committee. In order to provide section similarity and to assist individual faculty members, a packet of listening-related materials was distributed to all staff members instructing the new "Essentials of Speech Communication" course. The packets included:

1. A list of listening competencies (developed at Colorado Wingspread Conference);

2. ERIC Digest reprints ("Listening: Are We Teaching It, and If So, How?", Hyslop and Tone; "Listening Skills in Business," Shermis; Idea Paper No. 23, Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development, "Improving Students' Listening Skills," Newton);

3. Selected handouts from past ILA conventions (these were placed in a general access file by T. Wirkus);

4. A "Motivation to Listen" handout from Brownell's Building Better Listening Skills;

5. A Listening Journal assignment description (provided by T. Wirkus);

6. Sample peer evaluation projects (provided by Laura Nelson of the department); and

7. A copy of "A Few of My Favorite Listening Instruction Sources" (T. Wirkus).

The general syllabus [Appendix A], mentioned earlier, gave students a review of the course goals and also listed some of the listening and evaluation activity choices.

This is the first year of instruction of our new course and it is fair to say that none of the four components: Research Skills, Critical Thinking Skills, Presentational Skills, and Listening Skills are sufficiently well-defined. However, there is general consensus that we have made considerable strides toward fulfilling our objectives and addressing the varied audience that comprised this mosaic.

As our department members continue to meet, to discuss, and to make revisions, there is the intent to continue to make a significant contribution to the new General Education program. We believe there may be no department on the campus that has greater potential to fulfill the objective stated in the summary report of the General Education Committee:

> The program should complement the students' specialization in a major or professional training program and help students develop the knowledge and forms of skilled thinking that will enable them to make effective decisions, sound judgments, formulate rational beliefs and identify, understand and solve or resolve complex problems.

APPENDIX A

SPEECH COMMUNICATION 110: ESSENTIALS OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION
COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Throughout this semester, you will be asked to perform a variety of tasks to meet the following four objectives:

1. The development of research skills necessary for the collection of information used in the development of factually based, informative and persuasive oral presentations. Thus, you should, by the end of the semester, be able to

- o locate sources of information for message development in the library and through personal contacts/interviews
- o analyze and incorporate information gathered through research into oral messages

2. The development of critical thinking skills necessary for the analysis of collected information and the transformation of collected information into coherent and unified informative and persuasive messages. Thus, you should, by the end of the semester, be able to

- o create an effective oral message from beginning stages of topic choice through rehearsals and final presentation
- o use information gathered from audience analysis in development of message
- o identify and use specific types of supporting material
- o identify and use specific patterns of organization for specific types of speeches
- o identify and use specific language strategies in message development and presentation
- o identify and use the various types of appeals in oral messages

3. The development of verbal and non-verbal presentational skills necessary for the effective delivery of informative and persuasive messages. Thus, you should, by the end of the semester, be able to

- o develop confidence and some expertise in the verbal and non-verbal presentation of messages
- o present oral messages in an extemporaneous style

4. The development of listening skills necessary for the reception of information presented orally and for the constructive criticism and evaluation of oral presentations. Thus, you should, by the end of the semester, be able to

- o develop greater sensitivity to listening as a communication skill
- o develop listening skills for the various purposes of appreciation, comprehension, empathy, criticism, and discrimination
- o develop the ability to become critical consumers of oral messages and to be able to provide constructive criticism for future presentations

(over, please)

SPC 110
Course Syllabus (con't)

ASSIGNMENTS FOR ALL SECTIONS

Oral Presentations

You will be asked to deliver 5-6 oral presentations. Requirements for each presentation, as well as evaluation methods and criteria, will be determined by your instructor. However, the following guidelines will be considered when your instructor develops the assignments:

- o at least one presentation will require the use of outside sources of information
- o at least one presentation will require the use of visual aids
- o at least one presentation will be videotaped
- o two presentations will be persuasive in nature
- o at least one presentation will use the information gathered by students during the cooperative investigation assignment

Note: One speech may fulfill more than one of the requirements above. For example, you may be asked to present a persuasive speech using visual aids which will be videotaped.

Written Assignments

You will be asked to complete certain written assignments. Requirements for each assignment, as well as evaluation methods and criteria, will be determined by your instructor. Your instructor may assign some of the following assignments:

- o listening log
- o at least one peer critique
- o at least one self-analysis, preferably on the videotaped presentation
- o library exercise
- o cooperative investigation/annotated bibliography
- o preparation outlines
- o audience analysis paper
- o speaking outlines
- o quizzes
- o paper on improving listening skills

Examinations

You will be asked to take two written exams: a midterm and a final. The content and nature of these exams will be determined by your instructor.

NO EQUIPMENT OR PROPERTIES ENDANGERING THE HEALTH OR SAFETY OF THE SPEAKER OR CLASS MAY BE USED. SUCH ITEMS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, FIREARMS, SHARP KNIVES, DANGEROUS CHEMICALS, EXPLOSIVES AND ANIMALS. ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AND ILLEGAL SUBSTANCES ARE PROHIBITED. IF YOU HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT THIS DEPARTMENTAL POLICY, CONSULT YOUR INSTRUCTOR.